

## *Author's Query*

For a forthcoming anthology, I would appreciate hearing from anyone who knows the whereabouts or fate of Alter Brody, the Russian-Jewish poet (born 1895 in Kartushkiya Beroza) who lived in New York and wrote in English.

ANTHONY RUDOLF  
c/o A. Glaze  
803 Ninth Ave.  
New York City 10019

# THE MENARD PRESS

23 Fitzwarren Gardens, London N19 3TR

Tel: 01-272 2992

22/10/80

Dear Mr. Mitchell,

Thank you for your letter  
which Andrew Glaze forwarded to  
me from N.Y. I immediately phoned  
Alter Brody!

I am co-editor of an  
anthology of Jewish poets to be  
published by Avon books in  
N.Y. in December. The only poet  
we could not trace was Alter  
Brody. There was no word of  
him after WW2 according to  
Marie Syrkin, who lives in Santa  
Monica.

Please thank your  
mother for ~~her~~ her kindness. And  
I thank you for taking the  
trouble to write to me.

Sincerely  
A. Rudolf

Anthony Rudolf

THE MENARD PRESS  
(ANTHONY RUDOLF)  
8 THE OAKS  
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LONDON N12 8AR  
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By air mail  
Par avion

N. 12

Be properly  
addressed

POSTCODE IT

Daniel Furbell  
Graduate School of Management  
University of California  
Los Angeles, Cal. 90024  
USA

ANTHONY RUDOLF  
8 THE OAKS · WOODSIDE AVENUE  
LONDON N12 8AR  
01-446 5571

June 1

Dear Mr. Mitchell,

How in earth did I make that mistake about  
Celia Mitchell? Sorry. Damn it.

I have sent copies of the article to a  
number of scholars and writers in America  
who — I hope — will advise about  
publication of Brody's work. I will keep  
in touch with you about this.

Sincerely,

Anthony Rudolf

P.S. If there is anything about Charles Reznickoff  
in the notebooks I know someone who would be  
very interested — his widow Marie Lytkin  
who lives in Santa Monica, and Helton  
Henderson a scholar preparing a history of  
negroes about Reznickoff.

P.P.S. Yes you did send me some fascinating  
material.





GRADUATE SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT  
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90024 USA

May 18, 1983

Mr. Anthony Rudolf  
The Menard Press  
8 The Oaks  
Woodside Avenue  
London N12 8AR  
England

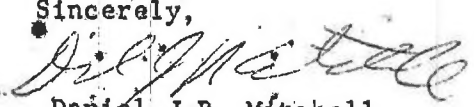
Airmail

Dear Mr. Rudolf:

Thank you for the Xerox copy of the article on Alter Brody. I might note that Celia Mitchell was Brody's second wife.

As I think I mentioned in previous correspondence, I have some essays written by my father after the period in which he stopped publishing. I believe I may have sent you a copy. (?) I also have two cartons of notebooks which he kept. If you have suggestions about what might be done with this material in terms of possible publication, I would appreciate hearing from you.

Sincerely,

  
Daniel J.B. Mitchell

ANTHONY RUDOLF

8 THE OAKS · WOODSIDE AVENUE

LONDON N12 8AR

01-446 5571

June 9

Dear Mr Mordkowitz,

I have your name from Daniel Mitchell. I understand you and your wife Judy visited Alter Brody over the years and were responsible for the funeral arrangements. In October I shall send you an article I've written about Alter. I co-edited the anthology Voices Within the Ark. Alter was the only poet out of 400 who my co-editor and I could not track down. But finally I tracked him down, and that's what the article is about. Celia Mitchell has sent me her most recent photo: 1938.... This is typical of the whole saga; and poignant. I wonder if by any chance you have a more recent photo. The editor of the magazine is asking for one. Daniel Mitchell tells me you placed an obituary notice in the New York Times on November 8 and that Celia Mitchell placed an earlier one. Could I ask you a favour: to send me a photocopy of these two notices. Thank you.

I know one or two publishers in America who would be interested in publishing a volume of Alter's work -- either a ~~xx~~ selected poems covering his whole career or a reprint of the original book with Untermeyer's preface. I am keeping in touch with Daniel Mitchell about this. He has also given me the name of Henry Goodman.

At a later stage I would like very much to talk to you about Alter Brody. I spoke to him on the phone. I wish I could have met him.

Yours sincerely

*Anthony Rudolf*

July 4, 1982

Dear Mr. Rudolf:

This is in reference to your nice letter of June 9, 1982. I am enclosing a photo of Alter Brody, Circa 1949 and a copy of the obituary notice I placed in the New York Times on November 8, 1981. Alter died on September 23, 1981. His gravestone is marked as follows:

ALTER BRODY  
Father Brother  
Uncle  
Born November 1, 1895  
Died September 23, 1981  
Poet laureate of the  
family and dramatic Voice  
of the American Jew

A large portion of his unedited material was shipped to his son Daniel, I have copies of some. This material is somewhat uncoordinated and requires some work to put it into good literary form.

I have available the following copies of Alters' books/publications as follows:

- A) Lamentations - by Alter Brody
- B) A Family Album - by Alter Brody (with an introduction by Louis Untermeyer)
- C) Clay - Poem(s) by Alter Brody
- \*D) The New Era in American Poetry by Louis Untermeyer
- \*E) Plays - American Life and Fantasy
- F) There is also a recollection that Alter wrote a book entitled "Indroctrin."

Alter was also a literary critic for the nation for many years--I have copies of his material.

He also wrote articles(s) for the Commonweal. His poem, etc. were published by Viking Press and American Mercury.

A special edition of Life magazine commemorating the 1944 Fourth of July had a series of poems published by the following authors. It appeared as a 24 page article called "The American Revolution":

A) Katharine Lee Bates

\*Contains material by Alter Brody

- B) Ernie Pyle
- C) Mallon Stacy
- D) Stephen Vincent Benet
- E) James Whitcomb Riley
- F) Jacob Riis
- G) Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
- H) Thomas Wolfe
- J) Louis Bromfield
- K) Alter Brody
- L) Abraham Lincoln

Mr. Henry Goodman is/was a writer and very good friend (of 60 years) of Alter and his address is:

Henry Goodman  
56 7th Avenue  
New York, New York 10011  
Tele. No. (212) 929-2645

My phone number is (212) 332-4912. You can call me any time after 6:00 P. M. (New York time).

Yours sincerely,

Irving Mordkowitz





GRADUATE SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT  
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90024

June 17, 1982

Mr. Anthony Rudolf  
The Menard Press  
8 The Oaks  
Woodside Avenue  
London N12 8AR  
England

Airmail

Dear Mr. Rudolf:

Attached is a Xerox copy of "Sarah Fiddlesticks," written by Alter Brody under then pen name Paul Jacobs. There is no mention of a copyright on the book and--since it was printed by a government agency--I doubt there was one.

Sincerely,

*Daniel J.B. Mitchell*  
Daniel J.B. Mitchell

encl.

# *The Menard Press*

ANTHONY RUDOLF

8 THE OAKS · WOODSIDE AVENUE

LONDON N12 8AR

01-446 5571

June 9

Dear Mr Mitchell

Many thanks for your very prompt and helpful letter as well as the fascinating manuscripts. I am about to leave for a trip abroad and will study the whole question of eventual publication later in the year. Meanwhile you will be interested to learn that an article ~~xx~~ by me on my search for Alter is to ~~xx~~ be published in October. The editor asked me for a photo -- in the same post a photo arrived from your mother, from 1938... I am writing to her of course, as well as to Irving Mordkowitz. Later I will write to Henry Goodman and to Sophia Hodes. I would be interested to ~~xx~~ read Sarah Fiddlesticks. Can you supply a copy? Paul Kerbel was a rabbinical student from the Jewish Theological Seminary who used to visit Alter. He read Alter's poems at the launching party of the anthology I co-edited: *Voices Within the Ark* (Avon Books). ~~xx~~ It gave me pleasure that Alter saw the book. I will keep in touch with you. At this point I am not quite sure what should be done, but I know of at least two publishers who love Alter's work, so we shall see.

Yours sincerely

*Anthony Rudolf*

# *The Menard Press*

ANTHONY RUDOLF

8 THE OAKS • WOODSIDE AVENUE

LONDON N12 8AR

01-446 5571

9/June 82

Dear Mrs Mitchell

It is very kind of you to  
send me a photo.

In the same post as  
your letter an editor — who is  
publishing my article on Alter Brody —  
asked me for a photo! So unless  
— Irving Morokowitz can supply  
a more recent one, I would like  
to use that one.

Yours sincerely

Anthony Rudolf

14/5/82

Dear Mr. Mitchell:

I was sorry to learn that Alter Brody ~~died~~ Paul Kerbel - his visitor - told me it happened in September. He did not tell me the exact date. I would like to know, for an essay I am completing. Do you have a photo of Alter Brody I could have? Lastly, I think someone should publish your father's poems. My essay should help. Is there a literary executor? Paul Kerbel mentioned a nephew.\*

\* I. Murdakovitz?

Yours sincerely, Anthony Rudolf



~~\_\_\_\_\_~~  
May 22, 1982

Mr. Anthony Rudolf  
The Menard Press  
8 The Oaks  
Woodside Avenue  
London N128AR  
England

Dear Mr. Rudolf:

Thank you for your note of May 14 concerning my father, Alter Brody. His exact date of death was September 23, 1981. An obituary notice was placed in the New York Times on November 8 by Irving Mordkowitz, a relative who took care of funeral arrangements.\* Mordkowitz's address is 2645 Brown Street, Brooklyn, New York 11235. He and his wife visited Alter from time to time in recent years and perhaps can provide you with information. His wife's name is Judy.

Alter had an elderly sister who lives in upstate New York. Her name is Sophia Hodes and her address is Route 1, Box 258, High Falls, New York 12440.

Another individual you might wish to write to is Henry Goodman, 56 Seventh Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10011. He was an old friend of Alter's who hopes to have some of Alter's writing published. Several years ago, Alter sent me several essays which he hoped to have published after his death. I sent copies to Henry Goodman recently who indicated that he might be able to arrange publication. I am enclosing copies of that same material with this letter. However, please coordinate with Henry Goodman concerning publication.

I do not have any photos of Alter and I doubt any were taken during the last 30 years. It is possible that my mother still has some from the period when they were married. Her name is Celia Mitchell. Address: 11 Fifth Avenue, Apartment 12E, New York, N.Y. 10003.

To the extent that there is a literary executor, I am it. Irving Mordkowitz sent me two cartons of papers of Alter's. The contents appear to be largely made up of notebooks in which various notes, ideas, etc. were written. The handwriting is quite difficult. However, there is also some typewritten material dating back to the 1940s. If you have any ideas about these materials, please let me know.

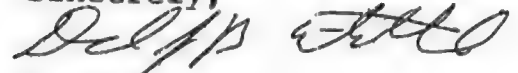
\*An earlier notice appeared in the New York Times placed by my mother.

At one point, Alter gave me copies of a journal known as "Clay" in which some of his poems appeared. I am sure this journal has long since ceased to exist; the issues I have date from 1922 and 1923. The copies also contain stories by Henry Goodman who could perhaps provide further information. It may be that no copyright exists for those writings.

I also have a copy of a children's story, "Sarah Fiddlesticks," written by Alter under the pen name Paul Jacobs. This was published by the Works Progress Administration, a government agency. As such, it presumably carries no copyright.

Thank you for your interest.

Sincerely,



Daniel J.B. Mitchell

encl.

cc: Henry Goodman  
Celia Mitchell

P.S. I am not familiar with the name Paul Kerbel mentioned in your note.

Dear Mr. Mitchell

I am sending my whole  
— publisher at last —  
to Irving Mordekowitz.

You will decide if ~~the~~<sup>your</sup>  
copy should be copied  
for Alice Mitchell.

I hope you like it.

Sincerely  
A. R. M.

and doubt. For example, the first illustration portrays Dante kneeling in front of a figure in a flowing robe. The corresponding verse speaks about *l'uccel divino*, the divine bird or angel. But the image is without wings, causing the sober-minded iconologist Franz Xaver Kraus to mutter a troubled 'zweifelhaft'. By the way, jokes about iconologists are suited to our times (form has expelled meaning).

The bus twists its way towards the station and the town disappears just behind its gate. You can see it again from the train. *Il Duomo* commands like the raised hand of a prophet. For the time being, 'The Last Judgement' is imprisoned under the vault of San Brizio chapel. It lies unfulfilled. In the honeyed air Orsieto sleeps peacefully like a lizard.

*Translated by Michael March and  
Jaroslav Anders*

Coming this summer

*Jaroslav Seifert's*

An Umbrella  
from

Piccadilly

£7.95

London Magazine Editions

ANTHONY RUDOLF

## Is that Alter Brody?

I recently co-edited an anthology of twentieth-century Jewish poets.\* It contains four-hundred poets from forty countries translated from twenty-three languages, as well as English-language poets from several countries. My co-editor, Howard Schwartz, and I wrote biographical notes on each and every poet. In only one instance were we unable to track down a person. Our note on Alter Brody ends: '... it is not known what became of Alter Brody after World War Two.'

No anthologist can resist taking a look at previous attempts in the same field. I first came across Alter Brody's work in Daniel Walden's interesting anthology of American Jewish prose and verse, *On Being Jewish* (Fawcett 1974) which I purchased in Mr Pompan's bookshop in Netanya. Brody appears in Section One, *The Immigrant Experience*, along with Cahan, Antin, Yezierska and some less well-known figures. Immediately I loved Brody's poems and even forgave Walden for not including that wonderful poet, Charles Reznikoff, Brody's exact contemporary. There was a freshness of perception in Brody's work, an authentic visionary quality, a special tenderness, which struck a spark in my ancestor-haunted soul.

\**Voices Within the Ark: The Modern Jewish Poets*, Avon Books, NY 1981.



# GHETTO TWILIGHT

An infinite weariness comes into the faces of  
the old tenements  
As they stand massed together on the block,  
Tall and thoughtfully silent,  
In the enveloping twilight.  
Pensively,  
They eye each other across the street,  
Through their dim windows –  
With a sad recognizing stare,  
Watching the red glow fading in the  
distance,  
At the end of the street,  
Behind the black church spires;  
Watching the vague sky lowering overhead,  
Purple with clouds of coloured smoke  
From the extinguished sunset;  
Watching the tired faces coming home from  
work,  
Like dry-breasted hags  
Welcoming their children to their withered  
arms.

According to Walden's note, Brody was born in Kartushkiya-Beroza in Russia in 1895. He came to New York in 1903. He published a book of poems, *Family Album*, in 1918, and a book of verse plays, *Lamentations*, in 1928. The note did not say whether or not Brody was dead, but this was a man who had not published a book for nigh on fifty years — or so it would appear, for Walden would surely have listed any later works if they existed.

During the years that Howard Schwartz and I were working on our anthology Brody's name would come up from time to time. His place in the American section was secure, but where could we contact him or his next of kin in order to send a permissions-form? I wrote to an institution well known and

highly esteemed in the poetry world, the Lockwood Memorial Library at Buffalo, one of the campuses of the State University of New York. I asked the curator of the modern poetry collection, Mr Karl Gay, if by any chance he had a copy of Brody's *Family Album*, as I wanted to trace the poet through his publisher. Fortunately the library had a copy of the book and they very kindly sent me a xerox of the entire text, which was a terrific boost because it meant we could range beyond Walden's own selection - for we were priding ourselves on *not* relying on previous anthologies and existing translations.

The publisher of *Family Album*, F. W. Huebsch, had been taken over - Karl Gay wrote to me - by Viking Press but enquiries to them and to the publisher of *Lamentations*, Coward McCann and Geoghegan, revealed only that Brody's last known address - 35 Schermerhorn Street, Brooklyn - dated back to 1934. I wrote to that address but of course the letter came back. The next step was to write to various friends, to poets, scholars and journalists, including one person who would surely know: Marie Syrkin, doyenne of American Jewish letters, prominent Labour Zionist, widow of Charles Reznikoff, and herself a poet. She had not heard of him since the end of World War Two. Marie Syrkin of course was an authoritative enough source for us to quote her in our eventual note on Brody. One of my respondents made the suggestion that I write to YIVO. This I did, and the assistant librarian, Debra Reed, replied that they did not know if he was alive or dead. He is not listed in the current

*Who's Who in American Jewry*, nor is he listed in the Brooklyn telephone book. She helpfully enclosed his 1940 entry in the *Universal Jewish Encyclopaedia* and his 1938-39 entry in *Who's Who in American Jewry*. The latter gave his address as 24 Clinton Street, Brooklyn, but I did not write to it . . .

Where did I go from here? I wrote to a cousin of mine in New York, Judy Rappaport, and asked her if she would make enquiries of the American equivalent of our Somerset House. Nothing doing. Ignorant Britisher that I am, I had not realized that no such centralized system of death registration exists in America. It would take ages and cost a fortune to track Brody down. I decided he must still be alive. After all, a living person can disappear just as easily as a dead person, if you see what I mean. Then I had a modest brainwave. I would solicit information through the press. Nothing came of an insert in the 'Information Please' column in *The Times Literary Supplement* in London. I had one card left to play: the *New York Times*, which would surely publish an 'Author's Query'. On 5 October 1980 their Sunday Book Review (edited by poet Harvey Shapiro who is himself in the anthology and who may have had a twinge of curiosity) published my letter c/o the address of a friend of mine in Manhattan.

A few days later the friend, Andrew Glaze, wrote to say that a lady had phoned with a message for me: namely that she believed Brody to have died several years ago. She supplied the address and phone number of Brody's first wife. In the next post there was a

letter forwarded from New York containing interesting information but with no leads. I was on the point of writing to Brody's first wife when a letter arrived . . . from Brody's son in Santa Monica, whose mother – the first wife – had told him about my request. He wrote: 'It is unlikely you will receive a written reply if you write to my father, as he leads an isolated life and has vision problems. You might write, however, and then follow your letter with a phone call. His number is . . .' Alter Brody was alive and, if not well, at least living in New York City! Alas it was too late to correct our biographical note in the book which had already gone to press.

I decided not to write. Containing my excitement until the cheaper evening rates began, I phoned Alter Brody that evening. 'Is that Alter Brody, the poet Alter Brody?' I said. 'Yes,' the voice replied. 'I want your permission to use some of your poems in an anthology. Thank God I have found you.' We had quite a long conversation. He explained that his health was bad and I got the impression that he was rather depressed. I learned too that though he had never stopped writing poems, he had indeed published no books after 1928 and no book of poems after 1918. However, he had been published widely as a journalist in the journals of the radical and progressive movements. An article by him in the 'invasion' issue of *The Nation* had been brought to the attention of President F. D. Roosevelt. Brody explained that he was a resident of the Jewish Home and Hospital on West 106 Street, though I was speaking to him at his own place. Mindful of the telephone

bill I explained I would have to ring off but promised to remain in touch.

I placed quick calls to my sister Mary at Yale and to Howard Schwartz in St. Louis. I asked them to keep in touch with Alter Brody, especially in the matter of his physical health and general well-being. When the anthology was finally published in January 1981 Brody was not well enough to attend the launching party and reading in New York, but a rabbinical student from the Jewish Theological Seminary who visits him every week at the home, Paul Kerbel, read his poems on his behalf. More recently my father and sister visited him. Maybe I will get to New York one of these days to shake the hand of one who – since the death of Uri Zvi Greenberg – must be the senior poet of Jewish inspiration writing in any language.

I love all the old-timers, and even more so since my own beloved grandfather died in 1980 aged ninety-nine and three-quarters. Their parents or elder brothers and sisters started arriving in America in 1881 after the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, one of the seminal events in Jewish history between, let us say, the expulsion from Spain and the rise of Hitler. Brody's Russia and America overlap, personally and poetically. *Family Album* is dedicated 'to Russia'.

#### TIMES SQUARE

An August day.

The eddying roar of the Square –  
Crowds, stores, theatres, tall buildings  
Assaulting the senses together –

And suddenly,  
The taste of an apple between my teeth  
Suffuses my mouth . . .  
Where did it come from? –  
Strong and sharp and deliciously sour,  
The taste in my mouth –  
Where?

I cross the street  
And suddenly,  
Crowds, stores, theatres, tall buildings,  
The glare and glare of the day  
Fade . . .  
October blows through the market-place  
In a town of faraway Russia –  
The booths are laden with fruit . . .  
A little boy,  
Snub-nosed, freckle-faced, plump,  
Dressed in a newly-washed jacket,  
Stolidly strolls by the booths  
Clutching a coin in his fingers –  
I know him,  
That freckle-faced boy;  
I know him.  
Proudly he passes the stores of the Row,  
Ignoring them all –  
Until he reaches at last  
the booth of the widow Rebecca:  
'What do you want, little darling?'  
'Here is a penny;  
I want this apple.'  
'Take it.'  
The tense little fingers uncloseto surrender  
the penny  
And close on a big red apple.  
And suddenly,  
The taste of an apple between my teeth,  
Strong and sharp and deliciously sour,  
Suffuses my mouth . . .

The hoot of an automobile,  
Insistent, shrill,  
Jars me back to the Square.

Several of the poems eulogize his  
childhood village and the New York he



grew up in. His poems, consciously or unconsciously, draw on three traditions: the European city 'mood' poem of the 'nineties deriving ultimately from Baudelaire (a mood also found in the early Eliot), the native American poetry of Sandburg, Masters and others, and the proletarian Yiddish poets of New York of the early part of the century. But their music and colour – young America seen through the eyes of old Russia – are Brody's own. In the words of Louis Untermeyer's introduction to Brody's book: 'the unifying note is its definitely Semitic undertone – that queer blend of love and hate, brutality and tenderness, cynicism and faith, of a great scorn and a greater suffering. It is this *historic power* that makes his lines seem to leap hotly from the cold black and white of the printed page'.

### LAMENTATIONS

In a dingy kitchen  
Facing a Ghetto backyard  
An old woman is chanting Jeremiah's  
Lamentations,

Quaveringly,  
Out of a Hebrew Bible.

The gaslight flares and falls . . .

This night,  
Two thousand years ago,  
Jerusalem fell and the Temple was burned.  
Tonight

This white-haired Jewess  
Sits in her kitchen and chants – by the banks  
of the Hudson –  
the Lament of the Prophet.

The gaslight flares and falls . . .

Nearby,

Locked in her room,

Her daughter lies on a bed convulsively  
sobbing.

Her face is dug in the pillows;

Her shoulders heave with her sobs –

The bits of a photograph lie on the dresser

Brody's place among the Jewish poets and among the American poets is assured – and that on the strength of one book published at the age of twenty-three by a young man born into a Yiddish-speaking family who arrived in New York at the age of eight. It is deeply poignant that he has published no book of poems since 1918 – though occasional single poems appeared in magazines and anthologies for a number of years. But, as he said on the phone to me, he never stopped writing poems. I do not know if there is any direct connection between Brody's disappearance from the literary world and his evident deep commitment to radical political and social writing and action. But I do know that his Russia/America will never be lost if *we* read with the same passionate attention which the young Brody and others brought to their writing, a passionate attention which culminated in that intense masterpiece, Henry Roth's *Call it Sleep*. In fact, apart from *Call it Sleep*, the older American Jewish writers have tended to be neglected in favour of towering figures of the next generation like Bellow and Malamud.

A publisher should reissue Brody's 1918 book and invite him to compose a memoir. And the poems since 1918 should be looked at. Perhaps they do not



sustain the strength and beauty of the early work. After all, despite many rumours, Henry Roth appears not to have written another book. When congratulated recently in Jerusalem on *Call it Sleep* Roth replied – poignantly and with dignity – ‘the young man who wrote that book thanks you for your congratulations’. Brody’s book should be reissued so that future generations – if there are any spared by the bomb – will know how one man’s ear and eye combined to make a music of perception which enchants like the old sepia photographs we all love. That world is gone, sheltering – we hope – under the wings of the Shekhina. But poems live on.

A FAMILY ALBUM  
(part IV)

Poor, warm-hearted, soft-headed, hard-  
fisted Uncle Isaac  
In his jaunty coat and flannel shirt,  
Stiff and handsome and moustached,  
Standing as if he were in evening dress –  
His head thrown backward, his eyes fixed  
forward;  
Conscious of the cleanliness of his face and  
hands,  
Fresh washed from a day’s grime at the coal  
cellar.  
When I look at his bold, blank face  
My mind tears through the dense years,  
Along the crazy alley of his life,  
Back to a Lithuanian village on a twig of the  
Vistula.  
Kartushkiya-Beroza (What a sweet name –  
Beroza is the Russian for birch-trees)  
And from a background of a dusty road  
meandering between high,  
green banks of foliage  
I feel two black eyes looking at me strangely,  
Two black passion-pregnant eyes  
Nestling in a little dark face.

Here, to end, is a poem which Brody dictated in December 1980 to the young rabbinic student Paul Kerbel. It makes a liturgically appropriate text for the Jewish New Year. It may also be the testament of an old and tired poet.

THE HOLY LEDGER

The Jew  
Like a mad accountant  
Trying to make sense out of a senseless  
ledger

Balancing the Holy Scriptures of his life  
With double entry bookkeeping.  
With good and evil.  
With reward and punishment.

Juggling the accounts  
To make debit and credit meet.  
To cover up  
the latest overdraft on his agony.

But sometimes  
In a moment of revulsion  
In a moment of insidious sanity  
He flings down his pen,

Calling God himself to account.  
For the terrible, impossible, inexcusable  
Entries in his book.

POST-SCRIPT. I wrote this essay in July 1981. The Jewish New Year in 1981 was on 29 September. I learned from Paul Kerbel today – 12 May 1982 – that Alter Brody died on 23 September 1981. May the memory of his name be a blessing.

---

LM June

Douglas Dunn on *Peter Porter*

# Jewish Currents

A PROGRESSIVE MONTHLY

22 EAST 17th STREET NEW YORK, N.Y. 10003 (212) WA 4-5740

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Sept. 9, 1983

Celia and Daniel Brody Mitchell  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Dear Friends:

It was indeed a surprise and a pleasure to receive your letter dated July 29 but postmarked August 26, enclosing a poem by Alter Brody and an article about him in the London Magazine by Anthony Rudolf.

I didn't know Alter Brody personally but I knew about his work, and in fact mentioned him as one of the Anglo-Jewish writers of the 1920s in my book, *A Pictorial History of the Jews in the United States*, published in 1958. I also have a cherished copy of his book, *Lamentations*, which I must have bought early in the 1930s. The jacket of that book contains very appreciative statements by Abraham Cahan, Lewis Mumford and Mark Van Doren about the plays in *Lamentations*. I was also aware of Alter Brody's poems that were published in the Anthology, "Within the Ark."

Therefore the article in London Magazine was of especial interest in sketching how Rudolf located him, etc.

Our Editorial Board would like very much to publish the poem by Alter Brody that you sent us, "Holy Ledger." The copy you sent us has at the bottom what seems to be the signature of Alter Brody. Is it his signature or was it written by someone else? In your letter you say that you don't know the date of this poem except that "it was written after the holocaust."

Now Anthony Rudolf in his article in the London Magazine says that "Brody dictated (it) in December 1980 to the young rabbinic student Paul Kerbel." However, the poem that Rudolf then proceeds to print is six lines shorter than the text you sent us and is much less impressive. Can it be that Alter Brody read the full text of the poem to Paul Kerbel and that Kerbel, being a rabbinic student, took the liberty of toning down Alter Brody's powerful language. In his article, Rudolf also says that, although he had published no books after 1928, Alter Brody had "never stopped writing poems."

Do you have any other manuscript poems by Brody that you would like to submit to us for publication? (I should explain perhaps that we are unfortunately unable to pay our contributors but we agree with you that,

— A publication of The Association for Promotion of Jewish Secularism, Inc. — (more)

# Jewish Currents

A PROGRESSIVE MONTHLY

22 EAST 17th STREET NEW YORK, N.Y. 10003 (212) WA 4-5740

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as you wrote in your letter, his work "would be meaningful to the readers of Jewish Currents.")

When we publish the poem by Alter Brody that you sent us (as well as any other(s) that you send us, we shall want to have a biographical introduction. Can you supply us with additional information about the last decade of Alter Brody's life? What work did he do? Was he engaged in any communal or political activity? When did he enter the Jewish Home and Hospital on West 106th St.

Finally, we are glad that you thought of us as a publication that would be receptive to Alter Brody's work. May I ask how you heard of us?

With best wishes for the New Year,

Sincerely,

*Morris U. Schappes*

Morris U. Schappes

Editor

MUS:P

PS Will you please also send us Anthony Rudelf's address?



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MORRIS U. SCHAPPES

Editor

Nov. 3, 1983

Daniel J. B. Mitchell  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Dear Prof. Mitchell:

Thank you very much for your letter of Sept. 15 and for the poems and prose works by Alter Brody that you enclosed.

Since I first wrote to you I have been in touch with A. B. Magill and Henry Goodman, both of whom knew Alter Brody well and worked with him.

Our Editorial Board read the materials you sent us, therefore, with great interest because of our personal interest in Alter Brody and his work. However, because ours is a publication with a Jewish focus, we want our material similarly to have a Jewish theme or Jewish frame of reference. For that reason we shall be glad to print the full text of Alter Brody's poem, Hely Ledger with a biographical note. This is about all that we can do at the present time.

The material you recently sent us we are returning. Thanks for the opportunity to read this. As to the two boxes of Notebooks that you have, my suggestion would be that you offer them, together with unpublished manuscripts, to a university library that is connected with an institution that has a graduate school with departments in English literature or American studies. The reprinting of some of Alter Brody's poems in the Anthology Within the Ark, the article in England by Anthony Rudolf and our printing of his poem may cause sufficient attention to Alter Brody to justify at least a Master's thesis in the graduate school.

It so happens that one of our subscribers and a recent contributor to our publication is Marek Aspiz of California State University at Long Beach. His specialty is American literature. His home address is: 378 Flint Ave., Long Beach, Calif. 90814. I don't know whether California State University has a graduate school and a library that has manuscript collections. If you wish, you may write to Prof. Aspiz saying that you are doing so at my suggestion and inquire as to whether the Alter Brody Papers that you have could find a suitable repository in that library. You may inform him that we shall in due time be publishing a poem by Alter Brody.

Please keep me informed as to developments.

Sincerely,

*Morris U. Schappes*  
Merris U. Schappes, Editor

MUS:p



~~CONFIDENTIAL~~  
~~CONFIDENTIAL~~  
September 15, 1983

Mr. Morris U. Schappes  
Editor  
Jewish Currents  
22 East 17 Street  
New York, NY 10003

*copy*

Dear Mr. Schappes:

Thank you for your letter of September 9 concerning Alter Brody. I am sending a copy of that letter to my mother, Celia Mitchell, so that she can supply you with the biographical information you requested. Her address, if you need to write directly, is 11 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10003, Apartment 12E.

The address of Anthony Rudolf is c/o The Menard Press, 8 The Oaks, Woodside Avenue, London N12.8AR, England.

I am enclosing a set of materials written by my father including the "Holy Ledger" which you already have. He prepared these materials over a long period of time--there is no way of ascertaining the exact date--apparently hoping that they would be published eventually.

I also have in my possession two boxes of notebooks he kept, also over a long period. They contain jottings of ideas rather than essays. If you have any idea what might be done with these materials, please let me know.

Thank you for your interest.

Sincerely,

Daniel J.B. Mitchell